

# Verbal Offers Used by Snack Vendors in Malang<sup>\*</sup>

**Kusumarasdyati**

English Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Surabaya State University  
e-mail: Kusumarasdyati@Education.monash.edu.au

**Abstract:** This paper attempts to analyse the call utilized by the street hawkers who sold snacks in Malang, a small town in East Java. The results indicate that their utterances could be classified into five categories. Most of them observed the Gricean maxims, a few flouted them, but none disobeyed them. In general the snack vendors could be considered conforming to the cooperative principle in offering their merchandise to the hearers or the customers.

**Key words:** pragmatic analysis, cooperative principle, Gricean maxims, verbal offer.

Scientific interest in human speech in relation to its use in the context has gathered momentum for the past few decades. Scholars have increasingly realized that the physical and social environments in which utterances are delivered significantly shape their meaning interpreted by the participants of an exchange. This equally applies to the spoken language articulated by vendors who are attempting to promote what they are selling while peddling along the streets in Malang. The present paper examines their verbal expressions of offer, but it confines the discussion only to the language spoken by vendors who sell snacks.

It has been proposed that language as a means of communication basically serves two functions, namely transactional and interactional functions (Brown & Yule, 1984). When language is used to transmit content or information, it is mainly transactional in nature. Conversely, it fulfils interactional function if it is spoken to establish or maintain social relationships. McCarthy (1998), however, observes that spoken language contains a large number of lexical items which are mainly interactional.

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This concurs with the phenomenon examined in the present paper, namely the language conveying offer as spoken by the snack vendors in Malang. Their language can be considered as having interactional function in this specific community as it does not merely inform the customers (the hearers) about what the vendors are selling, but also to attract the customers' attention so that an act of purchasing the snacks will expectedly follow from the verbal offer. Thus, it is obvious that the vendors attempt to establish a good social relationship with the customers.

To serve this function well, some of the snack vendors make excellent use of their creativity to invent verbal expressions of offer such that these expressions deserve a deeper analysis to reveal their pragmatic meanings. This paper, therefore, aims to investigate the words and phrases which they utilize to offer their merchandise and the degree to which they comply with a pragmatic principle proposed by Grice (1989). The key questions addressed in this paper are: What expressions do the vendors in Malang use to offer snacks and to what extent do these expressions conform to the Gricean cooperative principle and its four maxims?

Prior to answering the above research questions, it is crucial to define the scope of pragmatics and outline the principle and maxims which serve as a theoretical framework in the study.

## COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE IN PRAGMATICS

Pragmatics emerges as an independent field of study primarily because semantics frequently fails to provide sufficient explanations with regard to meaning. While semantics caters for the literal meaning of an expression, it does not take the context in which it is uttered into account (Cutting, 2002). Pragmatics, on the contrary, recognizes the importance of context, and thus can reveal the meaning underlying a certain utterance. To construct the appropriate meaning in an exchange, the speakers and the hearers need to negotiate it, taking physical, social, and linguistic contexts as well as the meaning potential of the utterances into consideration (Thomas, 1995).

Aitchison (1995) underlines that in a narrow sense pragmatics is concerned with how listeners arrive at the intended meaning of the speaker, whereas in the broadest sense it deals with the general principles followed by human beings when they are communicating with one another. The word *principles* implies regularity exists in the use of

language in communication, and this regularity derives from the fact that people are members of social groups and follow general patterns of behavior expected within the group (Yule, 1996a).

One of such principles is the widely known Cooperative Principle proposed by Grice (1989). He believes that people can communicate effectively because they are helpful to one another, so he formulates the Cooperative Principle that reads “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice, 1989, p. 26). This principle is elaborated further into four sub-principles called maxims as follows:

1. Maxim of Quantity
  - a. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
  - b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
2. Maxim of Quality
  - a. Do not say what you believe to be false.
  - b. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
3. Maxim of Relevance
  - a. Be relevant.
4. Maxim of Manner
  - a. Avoid obscurity of expression.
  - b. Avoid ambiguity.
  - c. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
  - d. Be orderly.

Aside from these four, other maxims such as 'be polite' and 'behave consistently' have been suggested (Crystal, 1997) to extend the existing classification. By contrast, Sperber and Wilson (1995) argue that the maxims can be reduced into a single maxim only, that is, that of relevance. However, the present paper focuses on the maxims proposed by Grice (1989) above.

In some cases, utterances may conform properly to the maxims. In some others, however, they may disregard one or more of the maxims by infringing, opting out of, flouting or violating them (Thomas, 1995). The infringement of the maxims occurs due to the imperfect linguistic performance of the speakers, for example low mastery of a language. The speakers opt out of observing the maxim if they decide not to cooperate in

a conversation. For example, they prefer to say ‘I don’t think I can give you any information about it’ or ‘I can’t tell you’ even though they know the truth. The flouting of the maxims happens “when speakers appear not to follow the maxims but expect hearers to appreciate the meaning implied...” (Cutting, 2002, p. 37), so the speakers deliberately break the maxims while still attempting to be cooperative in an exchange. The violation of the maxims, on the other hand, means the speakers intentionally disobey them, and are fully aware that the addressees will fail to perceive the real truth and interpret the speakers’ utterance literally. As a consequence, the hearers falsely assume that speakers are cooperative while in fact there is a large lack of cooperation on the part of the speakers, resulting in misleading interpretation.

It is essential to note that by asserting all of these maxims Grice does not intend to require all speakers to adhere to them strictly on a superficial level as it seems quite impossible to achieve. Levinson (1983) believes that it is the listeners who ought to interpret what the speakers say as conforming to, flouting or violating the maxims to a certain degree. The present paper, therefore, seeks to demonstrate how the speakers’ utterance may be interpreted from the perspective of the addressees in relation to the Gricean maxims.

## METHODOLOGY

The inquiry was approached from the qualitative paradigm, and employed a survey to reveal what the vendors uttered in offering snacks when peddling along the streets in Malang. To accomplish this task, observation was the most appropriate research instrument. I selected a street in a well-populated area in the town, assuming that more snack vendors passed this area if a larger number of people resided there. Then I was present on this street for a few hours three days in a week and observed snack vendors who regularly passed the street. When they approached, hidden audio equipment was activated to record what the vendors uttered to offer the snacks. This procedure lasted for three months, between March and May 1993. After the three-month observation and recording, data in the form of vendors’ verbal expressions saturated in that no new expressions emerged from seven snack vendors who had been observed. At this stage I ceased the observation and began to transcribe the recorded data for further analysis. To analyse the

transcribed data, I coded it by assigning categories to the words spoken by the vendors, and then mapped each category against the Gricean four maxims: quantity, quality, relevance and manner. The results of the analysis are elaborated in the next section.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The vendors turned out to be highly creative in inventing expressions to promote the snacks they sold and to attract the customers. While some of them utilized the conventional ones, some others manipulated words or phrases, resulting in surprisingly original expressions of offer. The analysis of their utterance yielded five categories of such expressions.

### ***Simply Mentioning the Word 'Kue'***

Three vendors offered their merchandise by articulating the word *kue*, an Indonesian word meaning *snack*. In spite of this similarity among the three vendors, a phonemic diversity existed: they pronounced this word differently.

[1] Kue.

[2] Kue kue.

[3] Kueh kueh.

The first one was pronounced /kʊI/ with prolonged final vowel, the second one was pronounced /kʊI kʊI/, while the third was /kʊEŋ kʊEŋ/. These three served well as the examples of expressions that obeyed the four maxims proposed by Grice (1989). By saying *kue* (or its variants), they gave sufficient, relevant information to the customers about what they sold (maxim of quantity and relation), and the information was a true one (maxim of quality), even though it was just one or two brief, unambiguous words (maxim of manner).

### ***Mentioning the Name of the Snack(s) without Any Modification***

Two other vendors preferred to mention the name of the snacks aloud instead of merely saying *kue* to communicate what they were selling to the customers, as demonstrated in the following data:

[4] Onde-onde, ketan, klepon, perut ayam, nogosari.

[5] Dooonat donat donat donat.

In [4], she uttered the name of all snacks she sold without performing any phonemic or morphemic modification. Likewise, in [5] the vendor mentioned the only snack he sold, namely donut. Interestingly, he pronounced it in an exceptional fashion: he invariably mentioned the word *donat* four times in rapid succession, resulting in perception that he articulated only a single word, i.e. *donatdonatdonatdonat*, on the part of the hearers. In addition, he consistently prolonged the first vowel [ɔ] he uttered.

Both sellers, like the first three, obeyed the four maxims. These two vendors obeyed the maxim of quantity even to a higher degree than those in data [1], [2], and [3] as they seemed to be more informative in communicating what they sold to the customer by detailing the name of the snacks. Their utterances also conformed to the maxim of quality and relevance because they were truthful and relevant. Nevertheless, the vendor who said [5] appeared to flout the maxim of manner to a slight extent by repeating the word *donat* and thus demonstrating prolixity, while still attempting to be cooperative.

### ***Mentioning the Name of the Snack in Reverse Order***

*Bahasa Walikan* is a linguistic phenomenon that occurs in Malang. Some people there tend to pronounce certain words in reverse order; for example *tidak* (which means *no*) becomes *kadit*, or *sehat* (which means *healthy*) becomes *tahes*. This phenomenon seemed to inspire a vendor who sold *lumpias* (*spring rolls*) so that he offered them in the following manner:

[6] Pialum.

However, instead of pronouncing each sound in reverse order, he inverted the syllables: *lum-pia* underwent transformation into *pia-lum*. It is obvious that understanding the word *pialum* requires background knowledge (Yule, 1996a) about *Bahasa Walikan* on the part of the hearer. Informal survey proved that the word *pialum* was completely incomprehensible for people who were not aware of the existence of this dialect. Therefore, even though this expression satisfied the maxims of quantity, quality, and relevance, it could possibly flout the maxim of manner—depending on who the hearers were—by ignoring the sub-maxims ‘be orderly’ and consequently ‘avoid obscurity’. If the hearers were people who spoke or had knowledge of *Bahasa Walikan*, this

expression could be considered sufficiently clear as they could recognize immediately and easily that the word *pialum* meant *lumpia*. Conversely, if the hearers lacked knowledge of *Bahasa Walikan*, they would fail to comprehend it. This particular expression, therefore, indicates the salient role of sharing background knowledge between the speakers and the hearers.

### ***Mentioning the Clipped Form of the Name of Snacks***

Clipping or truncation occurs when a word consisting of more than one syllable is reduced to a shorter form (Yule, 1996b). Some popular instances include *fax* (*facsimile*), *gas* (*gasoline*), or *ad* (*advertisement*). Two of the vendors made interesting use of this word-formation process. The following example was said by the same vendor who uttered the expression *pialum* above.

[7] Nogone.

The word *nogo* means *dragon* in Javanese, but in [7] it certainly did not refer to a dragon. Actually, this vendor truncated the four-syllable word *nogosari* (a snack made of banana, coconut milk and rice flour) into the two-syllable word *nogo*, then added the suffix *-ne*. In Javanese at Ngoko level, the suffix *-ne* can be used to offer something to someone. In the above example, this suffix indicated that he offered the snack.

Similarly, another vendor who sold various kinds of bread with the brand of *Bima* hinted his tacit morphological knowledge by employing truncation in promoting his merchandise, although he did it in a slightly distinct form. The differences lay on the absence of any affixes and the use of other clipped words (in addition to the name of the snack) to create humorous effects.

[8] Ma ti.

[9] Ti mpuk.

[10] Te mbak.

In [8] he shortened the word *Bima* (the brand of the bread) into *Ma*, and the word *roti* (*bread*) into *ti*. When these two clipped forms were pronounced successively, it resembled the word *mati*, meaning *dead* in Indonesian. In [9] the clipped word *ti* again occurred, but this time it was followed by *mpuk* which originated from the word *empuk* (*soft*). As a result, it sounded as if he pronounced the word *timpuk*, which means *to hit*

(with a stone, etc.) The last example was spoken by the vendor when he saw me on the side of the street. He wanted to offer the bread to me so he said [10]. Here he combined *ti* and the word *mbak*, which was usually used to call an adult female stranger. However, instead of *ti* /ti/, he changed the clipped form into *te* /tɪ/. A possible reason was that *\*timbang* did not exist in Indonesian, so perhaps he felt he had to adjust the pronunciation of *ti*. Therefore, when *te* and *mbak* were spoken rapidly and consecutively it sounded very similar to *tembak* (*to shoot*). From these three examples, the pattern that he used could be generated: a clipped word and another one was pronounced rapidly in order to make them sound like another word (Table 1).

**Table 1. Word Formation Performed by a Snack Vendor**

Words	Clipped Forms	Words	Clipped Forms	Combined Forms
Bima	ma	roti (bread)	ti	mati (to die)
roti (bread)	ti	empuk (soft)	mpuk	timpuk (to hit)
roti (bread)	te	embak (miss)	mbak	tembak (to shoot)

Furthermore, it could be observed that the clipped forms 'created' by this vendor—unlike the English truncated words which tend to originate from the first syllable (Plag, 2003)—were systematically taken from the second syllable of the original words: *Ma* < *Bima*, *ti* < *roti*, *mpuk* < *empuk*, and *mbak* < *embak*. Nonetheless, they were consonant with the property of clipping identified by Plag (2003), that is, monosyllabicity, as each of them was shortened into one syllable.

At a superficial level, such expressions as *mati*, *timpuk*, *tembak* and *nogo* seemed to gravely flout the maxim of relevance as these 'words' bore no relation at all to the snacks they were selling. As a consequence, there could be an impression that they were not truthful in offering the snacks, resulting in the flouting of another maxim, that is, quality. The maxim of manner was also deliberately flouted, as indicated by the ambiguity of their meaning, to produce humorous effects. To illustrate, the word *mati* could be interpreted as *die* or a compound of *(Bi)ma* and *(ro)ti*, the word *timpuk* might cause the hearer to generate two possible meanings (*to hit* or



*soft bread*), and so forth. However, in-depth analysis on the part of the hearers could result in the apprehension that the 'words' actually consisted of clipped forms, and the roots (unclipped words) *roti*, *empuk*, *Bima* and *nogosari* were very relevant to their merchandise so they made true contribution by saying *mati*, *timpuk*, *tembak* and *nogo*. Such analysis in turn would disambiguate the truncated lexical items.

In relation to reference (Yule, 1996a), the expression *Bima* provided evidence that a single referring expression can be used to identify various entities. Literal interpretation would result in the understanding that *Bima* referred to the hero in Javanese epic. However, such misunderstanding could be avoided because of the existence of the accompanying co-text (Mey, 1993), that is, the linguistic form *roti*, and the context (Mey, 1993), i.e. the fact that the vendor sold bread and the brand *Bima* was written on the window of his shelves. Thus, the listener should interpret *Bima* as the brand of the bread.

### ***Not Mentioning the Snack at All, and Using Other Words Instead***

Unlike the other vendors, the one who utilized the expressions [11], [12], and [13] did not provide any explicit statements about what he sold, that is, fried snacks. He neither said *kue* nor mentioned the names of the fried snacks, so he did not perform reference at all.

[11] Seket, seket timbang ilang.

(Fifty, fifty before they're gone.)

[12] Seket timbang ilang. Ijik panas, soale kenek srengenge.

(Fifty before they're gone. While they're still hot, due to the sunlight.)

[13] Seket timbang ilang. Ayo Mbak, seket, timbangane ilang.

(Fifty before they're gone. Come on Miss, fifty, before they're gone.)

From the aforementioned examples, it was obvious that he consistently articulated the phrase *seket timbang ilang* without mentioning any referring expressions, and occasionally it preceded additional phrases such as in [12] and [13]. Although these three observed the maxims of quality and relevance, by withholding the reference in this utterance he made his offer less informative than the other vendors, hence flouting the maxim of quantity. Also, they tended to disregard the maxim of manner,

especially the sub-maxim that advised against excessive use of words. However, it is essential to emphasise that the vendor was still cooperative by employing prolixity because the additional words played a significant role in attracting the customers in order that the vendor fulfilled the interactional function of language. As to the absence of information on the name of snacks in the offering expressions, the interpretation of these phrases required the hearers to make assumptions with the help of the context, or the physical environment. Seeing the vendor sell fried snacks and hearing *seket* (*fifty*) and *timbang ilang* (*before they're gone*), the hearers were expected to be able to fill in the gaps by deriving implicature (Grice, 1989; Yule, 1996a; Brown & Yule, 1983) that approximately read like [14].

[14] I sell fried snacks. Each costs only fifty rupiahs, and it is very cheap. Because of the low price, many people will buy them and they will be sold out quite quickly. Before they are sold out, you had better buy some.

By drawing this implicature, the hearers could figure out on the meaning of that phrase and come to the understanding that *seket* referred to the price of the snacks, that is, fifty rupiahs, and *timbang ilang* (*before they were sold out*) suggested the reason why he should have bought them.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the vendors offered the snacks they sold in five modes, that is, by mentioning the word *kue* or its variants, mentioning the name of the snacks, mentioning the name of the snack in reverse order by means of *Bahasa Walikan*, mentioning the clipped forms of the name of snacks, and mentioning any other words except the name of the snack. Some expressions they used turned out to obey the four maxims to a higher degree than others, but still all of the vendors could be considered as cooperative in offering the snacks as long as other relevant pragmatic tools were used, such as identifying reference, drawing the appropriate implicature, and having sufficient background knowledge. Consequently, the verbal offers either observed or flouted the Gricean maxims, and none of them infringed, opted out of or violated them.

Additionally, the aforementioned findings provided empirical evidence to the view adopted by Levinson (1983) with regard to the maxims. It was justified that the four maxims were not absolute rules that had to be strictly obeyed in order to keep a verbal interaction go smoothly. Rather, they should be deemed as common assumptions shared by both the speakers and the hearers when they were engaged in verbal interaction.

As a final note, it may cause great concern to learn that none of the aforementioned expressions exist at present (2004) with the exception of *pialum* and *nogone*. A vendor in Malang still offers snacks by uttering these two, but the others can no longer be heard in the streets. The number of snack vendors have been diminishing quite sharply since 1993 (when this project was carried out), and a possible explanation for this decline is the mushrooming snack shops all over the town. The loss of these unique expressions, therefore, is unavoidable due to the changes that occurred within the community in Malang. Nevertheless, the existence of the verbal offers needs to be recognized as an essential element in the linguistic development in this particular area.

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